

The Romolo Vargas Theater

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The Romolo Vargas Theater

by [Vodka112](#)

Summary

Antonio is the head male dancer for Francis' ballet company, and Romano is the surly stage painter that watches him dance in secret.

Notes

Gift to [reconquista in LJ](#)

The works mentioned are as follows: Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet and Macbeth are movies using William Shakespeare's revised scripts. Coppélia (L. Delibes), Cinderella (S. Prokofiev), Giselle (Adolphe Adam), Sleeping Beauty (P. Tchaikovsky), Swan Lake (P. Tchaikovsky), and The Nutcracker (P. Tchaikovsky) are live ballet performances. The Marriage of Figaro (W.A. Mozart) and La Bohème (G. Puccini) are live opera performances. Wicked (Stephen Schwartz) is a Broadway show.

Additional notes: I am NOT a fan of ballet. Sorry if it doesn't focus on ballet as much. OTL I'm more of an opera fan. Also, sorry if I use very stupid terms about stage management and stage design. Google can only go so far.

In the beginning

“Thank you. I cannot express how happy I am to receive this award! This is a pretty big and strong trophy... I have been building sets for years now. This... This must be the year for me. Five grand projects: *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*...[audience claps] *Swan Lake* and *the Nutcracker* Ballets...[louder clapping] and *Figaro*. All successful projects...[long silence]

“Oh, sorry. I am getting emotional in my old age. Again, thank you all for this wonderful award. I could suggest stripping but no one wants to see an old man’s body [catcalls] except that guy! [laughter]

“I cannot thank you all enough for this award. [flying kisses] Thank you so so much...”

-end of video-

“I have decided to retire from set design. [audience uproar; camera flashes and questions]...

“I have always wanted to give new bloods out there something to look up to. I have done that and I have enjoyed myself making the grandest set of my dreams in the *Marriage of Figaro*. Being the first set designer ever to be given an award, I am and always will be grateful to my fans. Eternally grateful...

“This will not be the last you will see of me. I do not think all of you are tired of my face just yet. [light giggles] But do not expect to see my name in big productions...

“That is all... [audience uproar]”

-end of video-

1 Romolo was there

“It’s really beautiful,” Feli murmurs as they pass each scenery hanging on the wall.

Little Feli’s arm is around his for a change. They march ahead, ignoring gawking, open-mouthed stares. At least they try to get a look at most of the designs in the exhibit before the reporter’s cause a scene.

They leave the modest paintings in favor of the in-depth architectural designs in the next cubicle. There are only two on display. Romolo knows for a fact that Romano stores more than a dozen models in his basement-turned-studio. A modified set for Puccini’s *La Bohème* captures Feli’s attention. He drops Romolo’s arm to coo at the miniature cardboard opera

singers his brother set up. Romolo glances at the second piece. Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* ballet. Very simple with stark contrast using colors and shadows. He inches closer. Furniture and lighting combined on a predominantly colorless (actually *colorful*) stage. Interesting. Romolo giggles. Romano sets whipping tops with ballerina cardboard faces on the miniature theater.

Good. Very good. This may work...

"Uhm, are you Mr. Romolo Vargas? The famous set designer?" a young lady asks him. He turns and beams a smile down at her.

"Why, yes, pretty lady! Who else would come to appreciate his own grandson's exhibition?"

"Grandpa, who are you talking to?" Feli attaches his arm to Romolo's and faces the girl.

"I think she is your brother's fan, Feli," Romolo chuckles.

Feli's eyes grow large as he drops Romolo's arm again this time to grasp the lady's hand in both of his.

"I'm so happy brother has fans now! Please continue to support my brother, okay?"

Romolo can see the lady melting from Feli's puppy-eyed stare. He can only admire his grandson's remarkable skills before he hears squealing sounds all around him.

He sighs. They still need to see the other half of the exhibit.

2 Feliciano was there too

"They took us to a café across the street! The coffee was delicious and the girls were very pretty!"

Feliciano tried hard to catch his brother's attention. He receives a grunt for his efforts. Romano is drinking the coffee (sweet, creamy, wimpy girl's coffee) he brought home.

"Have you slept yet brother?" He worries.

"Of course I did," Romano grunts, "Three hours. I set an alarm. This coffee is so lame but thanks. Now, get out of my room."

Feliciano sees the dark bulges under his brother's eyes and nearly cries in fear as the computer screen's blue light washes over Romano's face.

"But big brother, that's not healthy..."

“Like you can talk. You don’t sleep trying to practice on your violin before an audition.”

Romano slurps the last bits of whipped cream off the cup. His fingers fly over the keyboard to play with the mouse’s track ball. The structure on the computer screen twists and turns to follow whatever Romano had in mind for it. Feliciano appreciates the strange colors and shapes. Where and whose theater is it for anyway? And what type of show is Romano working on?

Something shines and shrieks from Feliciano’s left side. He jumps in fright.

“Oh crap, the paint’s dry. I need to get there quick,” Romano mutters to himself as he reaches for the cell phone to turn the alarm off. Romano quickly saves his files and doesn’t wait for the computer to finish shutting down. Feliciano watches as his brother procures a scarf around his neck from nowhere. Romano battles with his jacket.

Feliciano wants him to stay. He rarely sees Romano these days. He misses his scariness, rudeness and strong hatred for sweet Lud. He wants his brother.

“Don’t look at me like that Feli,” Romano says. He runs a hand through his hair. “You know I don’t show my face in public and I hate going to my own exhibits. I’ll pay you back for the coffee and snacks. They’re real life savers.”

Feliciano stares at a closed bedroom door by the next second, his brother’s footsteps sound farther and farther away.

3 In case we forget

“Don’t touch that!”

The man/lady flinches and freezes on the spot. Romano spares a split-second of his fucking busy life to observe. Tights. Make-up. Classical cut of a ballerina’s dancing dress (and if he recalls correctly, he himself fit for a big woman who will be playing *Swanhilda* tomorrow.) It brings him straight to his current dilemma. His volunteer painter, a real amateur, fucks up one of the windows and colors it green. Fucking color blind and did not feel the need to say so until Romano arranges the set on stage. Yesterday, Romano repaints the thing. The paint may not be dry enough. He prefers not to spend another second trying to paint the dancer’s hand white just because—

She/He is still looking at Romano, dark eyes so big like a deer caught in headlights. Uh. Retreat. *RetreatRetreatRetreat*. Romano thinks there’s only one thing this man/woman can be.

“Sorry, miss, I didn’t mean to scare you,” smile at the prima donna, “but the paint is not dry

yet. I'm sure I had a sign up somewhere. Anyway, we wouldn't want to get your lovely fingers dirty, do we?" Flash another smile. Walk away. Bad ass.

He thinks he hears a deep rumbling bass (and very *male*) laughter behind him but he dismisses the thought. Nobody smiles as warmly as a lady except a lady... or his little brother...

4 Francis brought trouble

Romolo remembers the scene like yesterday. The man before him laughs, carefree but not as innocent, with the clear nasal accent of his origin. A true Frenchman as the man swears himself to be. Flowing blond hair frames the young man's face. Romolo loves seeing the boy's facial lines. It makes him less conscious of his own.

He recalls that night. The very same man stands in front of him with fire in his eyes and brimming with confidence.

"Francis, what brings you here?"

Romolo is working on the set for *Figaro* due that very same evening. Production for the set is dated four months from then and another two months till opening night. He tries to find the patience for a dear friend's nephew.

"I have a business venture for you, Mr. Vargas," the boy spoke.

Romolo raised an eyebrow at the boy, probably a fresh graduate from university. He racks his brains for an idea about this so called "business venture."

"I wish to rent your theater for my ballet troupe, the – Company," the young man blurted out. His face shows no sign of distress, only a warm unsuspecting smile. Romolo studies the child even further.

"What good does it do to me?" Romolo challenges. He is ready to go off on a tirade about the money his theater brings into his bank account, how so and so companies have rented it for the season and how it's been booked for the year. And the next year. And the year after that.

"My lead danseur, Antonio, will be the next ballet star, give or take three years of good publicity," the boy cuts him off, "I am confident in all of my company's marketability."

"But that really has nothing to do to me, Francis," Romolo remarks as he doodles on his draft.

"Most of all," the boy continues, "I want to use Romano's sets for the productions. He needs

all the publicity he could get, no?”

Romolo leans back on his chair and sighs, long and loud. Francis Bonnefoy. He hears the rumors about the budding contemporary ballet company and this so called wonder boy, Antonio Fernandez. Romolo wonders briefly when Francis had started to plan on renting his theater. He knows he still have the leftover ticket stubs from when he was invited by Clovis to watch the – Company’s latest performance.

He takes his time thinking. He looks at his drafts once more. The fifth project for this year set for completion next year. All of the projects are going to be big. There is gossip going around about a set designer’s award nomination going to him. It is probably another certificate to add to the walls of his theater. He owns enough stock for himself, his grandsons and maintenance for the theater. But he really wants to retire, to turn over the baton to new people with new ideas and bigger dreams. He is more scared of Francis asking him to design the set for the – Company’s next show.

He thinks about Romano, his cute but feisty grandson who is currently slaving himself away at run-of-the-mill productions with little pay and nearly no publicity. Romano will be working closer to home. Romano can work on better productions. Hopefully, Romano will get tired of hiding his face from his fans and show up for a photo shoot someday. These are his current dreams. Should he jump or should he stay? The boat is sinking fast.

“Do you need a solicitor? A producer?” he whispers. The body in front of him visibly relaxes...

Romolo is shaken from his musings by multiple strong taps on his knee. He finds a three-tooth little creature beaming up at him, all blond curls and blue eyes. He smiles and the little girl rewards him with drool.

“She was fussy during the rehearsals and I couldn’t get her to stay put,” Francis says as he sweeps the baby girl in his arms and offers a napkin at Romolo. He keeps his gaze on the floor as he bounces his child.

“Jeanne always found your office very calming. I thought that maybe Claire will too,” Francis grimaces, “I guess I was wrong.”

5 In the form of

The first time Romano sees the Ass (in person and up close) is when he drafts the set of Prokofiev’s *Cinderella* for the – Company. It’s his 14th project and his first for the season. He sits on the back row of his old man’s theater (his grandfather’s, not his poor excuse of a father), the tips of his fingers black with charcoal powder and bits of blackened eraser around him. He looks up the stage to correct his size estimations and writes on the edges of his work.

Bam! The Ass faces him from the space of 25 seats. What a fucking view.

The man stands on pointe and goes down again as if he's unsure about his footing. Romano wants to scold The Ass (fucking trespassing on private property!) but he finds out he can't. All that up and down action jiggles those sumptuous pert round mounds.

Romano jumps from his seat before he realizes and swears he's getting closer to scold the Ass for trespassing (not to get a closer look at the perfectness). The Ass twists and turns, like a ballerina (Oh. Bulge.) and does five revolutions, his leg swinging out to his side once in a while. Romano's eyes drift higher and higher. The Danseur's face smiles like a mannequin but his eyes... deep emerald and mischievously innocent...

Those eyes pin him down where he stands.

The danseur breaks his stance and shyly smiles at him. Romano finds his tongue again, just when he needs it.

“W-who are you and what are you doing here?”

Romano scolds the man who looks more embarrassed now that Romano's climbing up the stage.

“Uh, my name's Antonio. I'm with the – Company. Are you okay? You look very red. You look a lot like the owner of this place. Are you his son?” Antonio chattered.

“I'm not related to that grandpa!” Romano denies, “B-but I do work here and I hate interruptions!” (and I'm definitely not red anywhere!)

“Ah, I'm sorry. I thought I could get a sense of the space since Francis promised we're doing all our projects here from now on!” Antonio spreads his arms wide.

“What are you doing by the way? Architecture?” Antonio tries to peer at Romano's drawings, “You still look pretty red, you know, your face. I don't think I got your name either.”

“It's Rovino.”

“Just Rovino?”

“Just Rovino. Can you please get your ass off the stage?”

6 Antonio Fernandez Carriedo

“...the new rising star of the Romolo Vargas Theater! The twenty-four year old male danseur studied at...

“Now he will lead famous set designer’s theatre this coming season as the lead male dancer to the – Company in the role of the nutcracker in Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker* this Christmas. To join him as lead ballerina is Jeanne Iris in the role of Clara, the nutcracker’s love interest.

“Stay tuned for more updates, fresh from the theater world...”

-end of video-

7 We found out more

Romano paints the backdrop. Brushes dances up and down in sure strokes over the canvas. He holds a long roller instead of a brush. But even with six pairs of hands, the blue sky background for the much awaited *Coppélia* can’t be done any faster. He nearly breaks down in tears when he imagines how he will paint the drop if he’s alone to do it.

“Aww, man! This is too boring!” Alfred exclaims as he throws his brush on the ground for the umpteenth time. The brush falls on the newspapers with spot on accuracy.

“I swear, you just like seeing the paint splatter around you, bastard,” Romano grumbles under his breath. (He can say it out loud but two consecutive weeks of sleeping three hours a day is really taking a toll on him by dimming his *spicy* personality.)

“The girls aren’t even here today,” Gilbert whines some feet away from Romano.

“Why do we have to do this? It’s too boring!”

“Quit complaining and get back to work!” Vash shouts. Both men (boys, really) shut up and return to painting. Alfred picks his brush and spreads the pain nonchalantly on the cloth.

Something taps Romano’s knee and he looks down. A face peers up at him.

“C-can you please not paint so close to my shoulder, Mr. Rovino?” the quiet voice begs. Romano spares a glance at the man’s sweater spotted with sky blue paint.

“Sorry,” he mutters as he moves a little farther from the edge of the drop, “I didn’t see you there.”

The man smiles and... Romano forgets what he says. Someone startles him by hugging him tight.

“Hi, Rovi! What are you doing?”

Romano can't understand a word so he yells back, "What the fuck?! Who the fuck-?! Get off!" and paints Mattie's arm with the sky.

So his name is Matthew?

Anyway, he turns around and scowls at the Ass. Yes, he can recognize Antonio Fernandez Carriedo, principal male dancer of the – Company. Yes, he also remembers to rest his roller on the floor.

"Dude, not cool! Hey Mattie, are you okay?" Alfred rushes to his brother, crouched behind Romano.

"So, what the fuck does the famous Antonio Fernandez want?" Coffee has a way of reducing Romano's brain functions...

The Ass is dressed in gym clothes. He lays his black bag down and fucking ignores Romano to stare at the half-painted sky.

"Are you guys painting?" the Ass asks. There is a pair of deep green eyes accompanied by a blinding smile in front of him. Vash proves to be useful for scenarios like Romano's temporary brain loss.

"He doesn't need to be here, does he? We can throw him out, Rovino," and Vash stands up to crack his knuckles at the Ass. Romano is impressed.

"Don't mind him. He's just here to poke fun at *Rovino*," Gilbert mumbles from where he's working. The Ass moves and speaks with him instead.

"Gil! I didn't see you there! How are you? Is that a brush? I didn't know you worked here. Can I try?"

The Ass holds a brush and colors the canvas blue before Romano could even blink.

"Brother..." blond-potato-bastard-who's-too-close-to-Feli sighs.

"It's fine. That'll keep him quiet for a while and we get another volunteer for this boring job," Gilbert grumbles and dunks his brush with a bit more force than he intended. Gilbert yelps as the watery paint spills on his pants and into his shoes. Romano delights in the fact that the bastard will have blue socks for the whole afternoon. Vash raises a questioning eye brow at him. He waves him off and raises his roller, careful not to hit... what was his name again?

8 About the hero

“Antonio grew up in a farming family in the Levante, somewhere in south Catalonia. He went to public school and later sponsored by his family to learn ballet in Paris. While studying, he met his best friend and later colleague, Francis Bonnefoy. They promised to start their own ballet dance company and recruited most of their classmates at the time. In the present, the – Company consisted mainly of graduates of the – Ballet Opera Conservatory.

“Life was hard for Antonio. He had to plow through rock hard soil to farm their land while studying to be a danseur, but he overcame his troubles and now performs professionally for 5 years with the – Company and starring shows for the Romolo Vargas Theatre. Quite recently he had been injured while perfor–”

Antonio turns off his TV. The interviewer and her viewership will think they know most about Antonio Fernandez. But there are lots of facts the interviewer forgot to ask him. Out of spite, Antonio seizes a piece of paper and scribbles answers he believes his interview should have included.

- 1 Antonio was born in a farm house in Andalusia.
- 2 His mother's maiden name was Carriedo.
- 3 His favorite fruits/vegetables are tomatoes. He eats these raw.
- 4 His most favorite person in the whole world was his adoptive father.
- 5 His last intimate relationship was with the resident conductor and pianist of their previous theater space a couple of years ago. Roderich Edelstein was his boyfriend for a year, two months and five days.
- 6 Yeah. He's gay.
- 7 No. He didn't choose ballet dancing because he's gay. He loves to dance.
- 8 He can dance the tango as well as other ballroom dances. That's how he met Gilbert by the way.
- 9 Francis groped him during ballet class. Somebody punched Francis so hard he had to be rushed to the clinic. Antonio doesn't remember who it was though.
- 10 He absolutely hates Arthur Kirkland from the – Ballet Opera! That person is his sworn enemy and, sadly, his brother-in-law through civil partnership in the UK and legal marriage in Spain.
- 11 He visits both of his families, the one in Catalonia and the one in Andalusia, whenever there's a break between seasons. He also buys them the occasional ticket to watch his performances. He never sends them tickets redeemable on the same date.
- 12 He loves the farm. He loves watching the plants (his babies) thrive in the soil he tilled and watered.
- 13 He lived with Francis and Gilbert for a while. Francis moved out recently to live with Jeanne.
- 14 He owns the balcony in their apartment and a dozen of his babies are living in there. He harvests tomatoes and other herbs once in a while.
- 15 He likes his coffee black only if he gets to eat sweet cookies with it.
- 16 He sings *Macarena* in the bathroom before every show. Every. Show... Shakira just doesn't cut it for him.
- 17 He fell down on the stage and grazed his back on a hanging nail during *Swan Lake*. Rovino was furious but didn't let go of him till the medic arrived. Antonio expects it to scar

soon. He gets a forced vacation because of the incident.

18 He loves getting flowers randomly but he prefers tomatoes.

19 He knows people love his green eyes and lush lips. He puts both to good, manipulative uses. (Why are you looking at me like that?)

20 He drools in his sleep and has drooled on a lot of people.

21 He sometimes wonders how long courting usually happens because Feliciano swears Rovino is gay and Antonio catches him looking at his backside too much sometimes and Antonio prepares him coffee and gives him tomatoes to munch on and helps out with painting the set when he's free but Rovino always says he doesn't have free time when Antonio asks him out and Antonio doesn't know what to do anymore.

Romano Vargas is a very peculiar, contradictory man. He charms his audience with bold themes and colors and shapes. He leaves no media in silence. Even in his real life, close friends and family testify to love his... overtly opinionated views and colorful language.

Romano's personality asks, no, *demand*s attention and focus to his being. His brilliance and genius expects it.

So it comes as a surprise when Romano Vargas refuses to have his picture taken during interviews and utterly turns down any acknowledgement except on paper at every theatre project he worked at.

There are complications. Stupid young artists use his name more often than he expects them to. It is a blessing that most important people knew who he is and respects his need for privacy. One of them is his grandfather, Romolo Vargas. When you have a grandfather like Romolo Vargas, you can be sure to do huge, impossible things.

Take Feliciano Vargas for example. Beautiful Feliciano who always smiles, ready to play his violin to anyone who would listen. He started like most violinists but he has climbed up to playing with a famous concert group at the age of 19 and is now touring worldwide. (Romano tries to forget the name of the group.) In between seasons, he plays for children at the park and bothers Romano when he comes to play with the potato in his studio. But he's twenty four now, closely approaching twenty five, and it seems that he is getting bored of playing the violin to audiences all around the world. He is staying home at longer time intervals. Romano hates that about him. It makes Romano feel like he should stay home as much as Feli does.

Romano is still doing the same thing he was doing when he was five, just like little Feli. Romano believes he would have been a virtuoso pianist by now if not for his very delicate health during childhood. Back then, he easily catches fevers and must be comforted by his idiotic brother's nails-scratching-the-wooden-board violin playing whenever he needs to stay in bed. He also acquires a very twitchy muscle reflex that drops expensive violas, clarinets and timpani while banging loud on the pianoforte. He can't even draw.

Grandpa Romolo leaves him in dancing class every Sunday and Saturday. He watches the

ballet dancers in their tiny tutus and tights. He nearly wishes he can dance like they do (because it is very beautiful!) but his spasms don't let him stay still for a moment. He learns Ballroom dance instead, and some contemporary dancing. When Jeanne gets married, Romano hopes to use his rusty skills at the dance floor.

Sometimes, he slips into the practice hall in the theater's basements. It is covered with mirrors all around. He removes his jacket and plays Latin American music off of his mp3 player (Feliciano's gift and very *rarely* used.) He slithers, jives and jumps to the music and calms his mind. Nobody can catch him in the act yet. (How could they? Romano comes around 2am to 3am.)

Lately, he feels it too dangerous to dance in that space. Instead of complete solidarity, he feels the questioning eyes of dancers and actors behind his back. He visits them and takes their measurements. Even when they have all gone home, Romano can feel their gazes drill holes through him.

He stops coming by to dance.

Then again, he is designing a set for *Sleeping Beauty* for the – Company, *Giselle* for another ballet company, a modernized *Macbeth* and lastly, *Wicked* for a musical troupe. As he twists the door open, he thinks about dropping one of his projects.

He strolls into the room with classical music blasting his ears off. He's angry at the dancers for leaving the cd player on after practice and hurries to switch it off.

Something jumps on the corner of his vision and he swings away just in time to stop a leg from colliding with his face. He retreats to the shadowed entrance of the space and stares in amazement as Antonio flies around the room. The man flutters, turns, twists and shows off to nobody, till Romano catches his eyes. Antonio grins at him before he bows and turns off the cd player.

"Is there something you need, Rovi?"

Romano doesn't answer but he looks at Antonio all the same.

"Rovino?"

Romano recognizes his nickname and stutters out an answer, "I-I thought there's no one here. It's like, what, 2 am?"

"Yes, I guess it is," Antonio laughs, "I really don't want to go home to my apartment right now. Gil said he'll be having his other friends over."

"What friends? He's leaving you by yourself?" (What type of best friend is he? Romano vaguely remembers how hard it is to shake Ludwig off of his brother and vice versa.)

Antonio's smile is glassy and he turns his back to Romano, "I meant sex friends. He's having them over for an orgy."

Antonio gets his stuff together and slings his bag on his shoulder. Romano remains in the exact same spot Antonio left him, his jaw slack and open.

“Well, I’ll be going then Rovi,” he waves back at Romano as he exits the room.

“Wait!” Romano runs outside and grabs Antonio’s wrist. Antonio stops and looks at him with those dark eyes.

“We, I mean, my family keeps a spare room upstairs in case we need to sleep over. It has a bed and a small refrigerator. I can show you where it is,” Romano hates how he sounds like he’s begging. He isn’t. He doesn’t have to. It’s Antonio who needs the room to stay! His grip on Antonio’s wrist loosens.

“It’s just a suggestion,” Romano says as he runs a hand through his hair, “You look like you need a place to crash in and, honestly, no one even knows there’s a room up there except me and grandpa.”

“Can I really? You’re not angry?” Antonio asks him.

“Why would you think I’m angry? You can use it. I’ll show you where it is.”

Antonio never quite answers his question but Romano does leave the theater at 3:30 am with his heart light as if he danced the whole night away.

He promises himself to watch Antonio dance as much as he can.

9 Due to excess booze

Romano loves parties and weddings. His crap of a brother is always asked to play (and the little shit loves doing just that) while he chats up pretty ladies in gowns and perfumes and make up. There’s also that factor of having a glass of champagne or brandy always in his grasp.

He looks at the tables in distaste. He wants to go over and rip the bows off the pretentious table cloths. Everything is perfect except for those and he complains to Francis and his grandfather about it. He is not the coordinator of the wedding after all. There is nothing he can do but glare daggers (scissors!) at the atrocities for the rest of the evening.

He kisses the bride and the bridesmaids while tipping glasses with the men. He laughs with Gilbert because everyone freezes and stares at a laughing, red-faced Ludwig. He doesn’t bat an eyelash when Gilbert invites him up the dance floor. His vision is spinning a little but hey, it looks fun! Gilbert dances like a moron and doesn’t even attempt dance properly half the time. It doesn’t take a while before they all form a crazy circle moving to and fro like those

tea cups in an amusement park ride.

Romano wishes the bride a happy married life and lots of kids and kisses her once more. He stumbles into somebody, apologizes, before he crashes down to the floor. He remembers turning to face the ceiling. He wonders when the lights turned off till he sees deep green eyes and springy dark brown hair. The ringing in his ears are louder than what Antonio is saying so he reaches up and kisses the man on the mouth too.

“You’re so pretty,” he tries to say and pinches the man’s cheeks for the heck of it till he promptly falls asleep.

10 It was important

Romano wants to kill that bitch. He wants to strangle her with his bare hands and rip off her white blond hair. That bitch.

Antonio babbles like the idiot he is while lying face down on the floor backstage. Gilbert is cutting his costume. The blood permeates through the swathes of starched cloth and stains the golden stitches Romano spent weeks to make. The blood flows freely once they peel the costume off Antonio’s back. Romano takes a perverse glee at pouring alcohol on the dancer’s wound. Antonio stops chattering and grunts in pain. Fuck him, babbling on about how fine he is and how it doesn’t hurt and all that crap.

The nail that grazed Antonio’s back is very thin and pointed. Romano keeps it in his pocket for evidence.

The gash is angry looking and very long, so long it takes two people to put pressure on the wound to prevent Antonio from bleeding to death. Romano hears Francis announce the understudy’s name from the speakers. It’s Ivan Braginsky.

It takes all of his power not to punch the man. Romano swears the bitch planned this. Fucking crazy bitch, Antonio could’ve *died*!

“Is he alright?!” Alfred bursts into question. He kneels down next to Romano and pushes on the wound, “I’m so sorry Romano. This is my fault! I’m the one who’s in charge of checking the place and—”

“Shut up.”

“I’m sorry Romano—”

“I said shut up!”

Alfred actually shuts up and deliberately stares at his hands. They hear the medics rush into

the hallway carrying a stretcher. They hoist Antonio up and run off. Gilbert shifts from foot to foot before running after the team.

Romano glares at Alfred.

“My name is *Rovino*,” he murmurs to the man. Alfred shakes. Romano doesn’t know if it’s out of fear or hatred at this point. He stares straight into the man’s blue eyes.

“It’s not your fault, Alfred.”

Romano turns around and comes face to face with Ivan Braginsky.

“Because it’s your fucking fault, right?” Romano smirks.

The Russian dancer just smiles at him. He breaks and lunges for the man’s neck.

11 To talk about feelings

Antonio plays around with Romano’s body. He slides his fingers up and down Romano’s arm. His fingers mimic walking feet and he giggles when Romano tries to swat his hand away.

“You’re definitely awake now so get off,” Romano growls at him.

“No way! This is very comfortable. And I told you I like cuddles. Do you hate cuddles? Because if you do, that’s a big problem for me. You know I love cuddles—”

“Yeah. Yeah. Shut up,” and Romano moves his arm, the one around Antonio’s shoulders, to cover his eyes and feign sleep.

“Roma?”

“Go to sleep, Toni.”

“Why do you call yourself Rovino?”

“None of your business.”

“Isn’t it a bad name, like “the destroyer” something? Is there a story behind it? Did your grandpa call you that way? Your father? Your mother? Come on, there must be something about it. My mother always calls me To ñ o. Well. Everyone in my family does. My big brothers and big sisters sometimes call me To ñ ito. I didn’t like that one as much because it usually means I’m small and I’m not really small now anyway.”

Romano lifted his arm to glare at Antonio.

“You won’t ever shut up do you?” he grunts. Antonio just cocks his head to the side.

“But I wanna know!” he whines and wriggles on top of Romano to get his point across. Or maybe not. He wriggles a lot no matter where he is anyway.

Romano shoves him on the other side of the bed and gathers the sheets. Romano turns his back to Antonio and ignores him.

“Romano! I bottomed today, so don’t I get a reward or something? Come on. Tell me. Story. Story...”

“There was this teacher back in primary school,” Romano mumbles in his pillow. Antonio wraps his arm around him, wriggling to get under the sheets again and presses as much skin as he can against Romano’s.

“She was a bitch,” Romano continues, “No offense to teachers but she was a real bitch. One day, she called me Rovino. Then everyone in class called me that. Then everyone in my school did it. And now it just stuck. End of story.”

“But, Romano, why would she call you Rovino? Did you break the classroom vase? The window? You did, didn’t you? I remember when – ”

“I couldn’t help myself! It’s not my fault!” Romano turns and yells at him. Antonio stares back. Romano huffs and turns away again.

“I’m sorry,” Antonio murmurs in his hair.

“It’s not your fault.”

“Are you angry?”

“No.”

Antonio makes it his goal to know exactly what happened. But now, he contents himself with burrowing his nose between Romano’s shoulder and neck, feeling the thundering heart beneath the skin and bones.

“You could’ve just told me! Then I wouldn’t have to go pester everybody else!” Antonio shouts.

“But you have no right sniffing around like that!” Romano shrieks back.

“You won’t tell me!” Antonio roars. Romano is still like a statue. Antonio softens his tone.

“You should just tell me.”

“What’s the use? You already know,” Romano snaps at him. He crosses his arms and glares at Antonio.

“I... I don’t. Everyone said it’s important but they won’t tell me. Why won’t they tell me, Romano? What’s so important about breaking a few vases? I broke my share of windows and chairs. It’s nothing big. I... I just want to know. But I guess you just don’t trust me enough?”

12 Antonio said so!

“Romano? Who? Gilbert, I think they got the wrong person on the news...”

Francis settles himself close enough to Antonio in case he freaks out.

“It’s true. Don’t you notice how he bosses the artistic crew around? He screened each and every one of us. It’s part of our contract and honestly, we respect him enough to leave him alone,” Gilbert explains.

“So... Romano is actually Rovino?” Antonio asks. His face is void of emotion.

“Actually, Rovino is his pseudonym. He says he gets the best results when people are clueless about him,” Francis cuts in.

“B-but Rovino is Rovino – ”

“They’re the same person! Don’t you get it yet Toni?!’ Gilbert nearly screams in frustration.

“But why would he lie? And Rovino... why would he use a name like that?” Antonio asks.

“We don’t know exactly why,” Francis said, “He doesn’t want to tell but we just respect him and his choices. I don’t know what the media thinks though.”

Francis and Gilbert both grimace.

“What? What happened?”

“He, uh,” Gilbert started, “He sorta took charge of the situation so things are a bit bad on his end.”

“You mean, he took the blame for the show?”

“He’ll be fine, Antonio. He’s a well-received figure out there, whether he likes it or not. He just needs to lie low for a while or something,” Francis mumbles back.

“But that’s just wrong! It’s an accident!”

“It’s not an accident if the rest of the season’s tickets are left unsold,” Francis replies.

“How much are we looking at?”

Francis gives an uncomfortable smile.

“Shit.”

Romano rushes into the hospital room with a bunch of flowers. And a grocery bag. Antonio looks at his direction before smiling a big grin.

“Hi Roma! I’ve been waiting for you to visit, you know?” He pouts, “People are saying weird stuff on the TV and my doctor says I should be okay by tomorrow and uh the police came to get a testimony from me. For a moment then I thought they’d arrest me for, I dunno, a parking ticket? Anyway, don’t believe what other people say about you, okay?”

“Wait, what?” Romano stares at him wide eyed.

“I realized the other day that I’m allergic to some wild flowers, so if you have wild flowers in there, I should probably not hug them right now,” Antonio chatters on.

“I swear, you speak just as fast as Feli,” Romano mutters before putting the flowers down on the bedside table. He sits on the ugly metal hospital chair with his groceries on his lap and gawks at Antonio.

“Uh... Roma? All that staring is weirding me out,” Antonio stutters.

“Why do you call me Roma?” Romano asks him.

“Well, your real name is Romano, right? I saw you on TV. I wish they taped you more than they taped my ambulance or at least played your interview a lot more than they did mine. You look really good on TV. And I hate your nickname. I think Roma works a lot better. It’s more cute. And... Roma?”

Romano abruptly stands up. His face is red and the tips of his ears as well. He dumps the groceries on Antonio’s lap (nearly squishing little Toni, but Antonio swerved in time) and runs for the door.

Antonio frowns at the door as it helped Romano get away. He looks down at the grocery bag and finds succulent round and red veggie/fruits. He bites into one and smiles. Romano is not angry at him at all. It’s a relief.

13 Romano Vargas stole the show

“That fucking nail cut through him like a knife, you son of a bitch!” Romano hisses at the Russian. His grip on the man nearly rips the costume.

Alfred and Lars in his Rothbart costume hold him back the next second. By then, he is trashing about spewing curses and threats at anyone and anybody.

“Come brother, you don’t need to explain anything to those fools,” the bitch beckons to Ivan from the opposite end of the hallway and the fucker actually moves to follow her?!

“It’s them. They did it. That fucking bitch planted the nail,” Romano whispers urgently at Lars and Alfred. He feels both of their arms tighten on his and he winces.

Francis runs into the hall and commands the siblings to stay in the dressing rooms. Nothing he says can quell Romano's rage.

“But, that’s impossible, Ro...vino. I checked the place before. It was clean!” Alfred denies.

“She planted the nail in between acts! There was no way you could have seen her. Even I didn’t. But I saw her push Antonio down, Alfred. That bitch. I want that bitch to burn.”

“Calm down Rovino,” Lars grinds his teeth, “We can’t do anything to her right now. Calm down first.”

Romano doesn’t calm down. But he stops struggling and rights his clothes after they let him. His jaw is stiff as he faces Alfred.

“I’m sorry, Al. I told you they can’t be trusted.”

He sees the guilt vanish in Alfred’s steel blue eyes, replaced by cold anger. Romano considers it a big triumph, to turn one lover against the other. He busies himself with checking Lar’s costume for any wreckage. He feels Alfred watching his every move. He feels the American’s agreement in the silence. He decides to stay by the wings instead and watch the party crash and burn.

“Alright. You fucking win,” Romano slurs as he drags his body into the basement of the theater. Antonio dances on and ignores Romano. He needs to learn to tell important people secrets. To tell important stuff to people that matter!

Romano trips on the CD player cord by mistake. The music stops and Antonio whirls around to glare at Romano. Except he doesn’t glare long enough. Romano’s eyes are half-closed and

he slides down on the floor. He looks unhealthily flushed and sweating too.

“Are you alright, Roma?” Antonio panics and runs to where Romano slumps against the wall. Romano waves his hands away.

“I said you fucking win! Now get your prize,” Romano mumbles under his breath.

“I don’t understand you Romano. Why are you drunk? Did you go to a party? You challenged Gil on a drinking match again, did you? You know no one can beat him,” he nags at Romano.

“Stop talking. It hurts. Ah,” Romano grumbles as he closes his eyes and slides to lie on the floor.

“Up we go then!” Antonio grunts as he hauls Romano’s body across the room, out into the hallway, into the elevator, out into the hallway again and into the spare room Roma gave him the key to. All the while, Romano would swat his hands, or his arms, or his face.

“I’m alright!” Romano shouts as he lands on the bed. He attempts to lie on his back but Antonio pushes him so he lies on his side.

“You’re drunk, Romano. That’s bad. You shouldn’t be drinking that much if you’re alone,” Antonio murmurs to the room.

“I’m not alone. You’re with me, aren’t you? Don’t you fucking go anywhere,” Romano mumbles and slurs.

“Yeah, I won’t go,” Antonio whispers in his ear as he sits down on the floor next to the bed.

“Sydenham’s Chorea.”

“What?” Antonio turns to look at Romano’s closed eyes and reddish sweaty face.

“I had it for three years. It was hell.”

14 Ti amo o ti voglio bene?

Antonio Fernandez Carriedo always sings *Macarena* in the shower before every performance. Romano would know because he hears the man’s tunes from the shower in the men’s dressing room.

Antonio Fernandez Carriedo arrives three hours early every show, no matter if the show call time is six am. He will be in the dressing room by three am. He will be bathing by four thirty. Romano will be waiting, ahem, passing by the men’s dressing room to, uhm, make sure the dancer’s costumes are all in place. By six am, Antonio will be spotlessly clean and ready for warm ups and rehearsals. Romano will be there too. He needs to see if some of his props need to be moved (which never happens because his set is perfect like that), if some lighting positions need to be changed (this happens a lot. Romano can’t predict where people will

stand all the time, geez.) and if some drastically nervous dancer forgets her pin, or her shoes (or her bra... but that only happened once.)

While everyone warms up, Romano will be manning the sound booth with Gilbert, Bel and Kat. Romano learned early on that Yekaterina, despite being half siblings with the Witch and the Snow Giant, is actually a real pussy. She'll end up crying backstage amidst the pressuring dancers and techies. Alfred, on the other hand, loves action and loves to boss people around: where to go, what to do and how to exit the stage. Vash does the same thing and only when they do this type of job do they get along. Everyone else (Potato, Mat, Hera and their group members) are stationed at different spots backstage before the performance; making sure everybody (dancers, actors and the props) are happy and ready and excited. During performance, they gather around the stage area and help the earlier two with pushing stuff around. Sometimes, Romano pitches in and helps them. But usually, he leaves them alone.

When everything is set up, they all exit the theater. No one is allowed in an hour before the show except the techies. The guests would trickle in and chat and enjoy their fucking show.

But before that, during special two hour intermissions when all the dancers are properly warmed up and busy with their makeup and the techies are scared away by Romano, Antonio sneaks in and dances a few bars. Romano watches by the sound booth. A short thirty-minute private show. Romano likes to think of it that way. He wonders if Antonio knows he is hiding and watching him from the hidden room at the back of the stage. Sometimes, Romano leaves the lights on in the sound booth just to be sure. Antonio creeps in and flashes him a smile before practicing his solo piece.

So it must be a private show, right? Right...

But Romano doesn't give up. He sneaks in at the rehearsals sometimes. No one notices a black clothed figure hiding in the darkness. He loves it when Francis takes the group on stage to practice. The shadows off the farthest back seats are perfect for hiding.

Often, he will bring his colleagues and build a prop or a drop on stage. Usually, it involves just cutting the material and sketching some important lines on the drop or various size approximations and changes on the more solid props. It takes longer to get done in the orchestra pit because the pit is fucking small and all his men are distracted by flying legs and tutus.

But for months of following (stalking) Antonio around, he still doesn't get tired of it. He is excited because of it. This game, this fucking game of chase is pretty elaborate. Romano doesn't know the rules. He doubts whether Antonio himself laid down any...

No rules... Well fuck...

What is he doing all this time!?

16 Romano must choose

“This is a pretty simple solution, Romano. Just go out there and show yourself,” Romolo baits his son.

“That’s easy for you to say! It’s not your reputation on the line!” Romano shouts back at him, already on the defensive.

“But you are not worried about your reputation anyway. Do not fear, you look like me. They will never doubt you,” Romolo jokes.

“That’s not it,” Romano hesitates.

“Consider it a challenge. It will be harder to get genius raw talent working for you if you are well-known but think about it. I think it is time you showed your face out there,” he stares at the liquor in his glass and downs it in one gulp.

“I swear if I find out you planned this...” Romano accuses as his right knee twitches up and down. Nervous. Romolo puts his glass down and stares into his grandson’s eyes. He sees determination and strength in there, but also doubt. Doubt not at himself, but at Romolo.

“I did not. I can promise you, she *will* be destroyed in the entertainment world,” Romolo declares.

“Why would you go through the trouble?” Romano challenges him. He smiles.

“A lot of people have invested in Toño— ”

“So it’s about money,” Romano pouts as he lifts his leg to sit comfortably on the chair. Romolo hides his joy at his grandson’s defeat.

“I am talking about his friends. They would not leave this matter unresolved,” Romolo lectures.

“And you’re one of his friends?” Romano scoffs. He looks at Romano’s face and blinks once. Twice.

“Are you not as well?” He asks. He watches in glee as Romano’s cheeks flush slightly pink.

17 His next adventure.

“He is doing quite well.”

“I’ve done such a wonderful job! Both of your babies have grown to be so sweet and cute.”

“Papà... Thank you.”

“It is nice to actually be there for someone most of the time. Oh! You made me remember something! Romano sent me these wedding ceremony invitations but he forgot to send yours,

so I'm sending you one too! Be sure to visit them, okay?"

"But, papà, they—"

"No 'but's. Weddings happen so rarely. And in Spain, too! It is quite close to where you work."

"..."

"Give it a shot. You chased your dreams. They chased theirs. I think now is the perfect time you meet."

"...Si, papà..."

"It is the least you could do after dumping them off on me when they were babies... I would love to see my family whole once and for all."

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